**CLAIMS:**

**1.** A method of assigning importance classes to electronic messages, the method comprising:

(a) identifying the sender of an electronic message;

(b) identifying the recipient of the electronic message;

(c) determining a relative organizational distance between the sender and the recipient; and

(d) assigning the electronic message an importance class as a function of the relative organizational distance between the sender and the recipient;

**characterized in that:**

(e) said function is independent of which of the sender or the recipient is of higher rank.

**2.** The method according to claim 1, wherein said function is further weighted by at least one additional criterion, selected from the following:

(a) a globally defined content criterion;

(b) a personally defined message sender criterion;

(c) a personally defined content criterion;

(d) a plurality of rules formed by a machine-learning algorithm or algorithms.

(e) an analysis of e-mail message headers.

**3.** The method according to claim 2, wherein the at least one additional criterion is a function of content in the message subject field and/or in the message body.

**4.** The method according to claim 2 or 3, wherein assigning the electronic message an importance class includes analyzing actions taken by said recipient on receipt of said messages so as to establish a relative importance ascribed by the recipient to received messages.

**5.** The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said electronic message is an electronic mail (e-mail) message.

6. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said electronic message is a facsimile message.

7. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said electronic message is a converted voice message or pager message text data.

8. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the relative organizational distance between the sender and the recipient is determined from an organizational structure of a corporation and said function is refined according to one or more of the following:

(a) a set of global control rules according to the organizational structure and the work affiliation among different departments and different hierarchical layers in the corporation;

(b) a set of control rules according to ad hoc work groups formed from time to time;

(c) a global list of preferred originating addresses, external to the organization, from senders affiliated with the organization.

9. A method for streamlining the management of electronic messages, the method comprising

(a) assigning an importance class to each of said messages according to the method of any one of claims 1 to 8; and

(b) streamlining said messages in a pre-determined manner in accordance with the respective importance class of each message.

10. The method for streamlining the management of electronic messages according to claim 9, wherein streamlining the messages includes displaying notifications of incoming messages in a color that is characteristic of the respective importance class of each message.

11. The method for streamlining the management of electronic messages according to claim 9, wherein streamlining the messages includes displaying in association with notifications of incoming messages a distinctive tag that is characteristic of the respective importance class of each message.

12. The method for streamlining the management of electronic messages according to claim 9, wherein streamlining the messages includes sorting notifications of incoming messages in a pre-determined order, indicating the relative importance of said messages in respect with their assigned importance classes.

13. The method for streamlining the management of electronic messages according to any one of claims 9 to 12, wherein streamlining the messages includes blocking messages whose importance class is beneath a predetermined threshold.

14. The method according to Claim 13, further including alerting the sender that a message has been blocked.

15. The method according to any one of the preceding claims being implemented on a copy of the message that is external to a central repository on which incoming messages are stored so as to enable uninterrupted service in the case that said method fails to operate or malfunctions.

16. The method according to any one of the preceding claims including selectively transmitting e-mail messages from an e-mail server's inbox to a client computer's inbox, according to said importance class.

17. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, further including grouping messages residing in a user's inbox into archives, according to their importance class and an elapsed time since they were received.

18. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 17, including using a graphical tool to define the organizational distance between different entities within the organization.

19. A system for assigning importance classes to electronic messages, said system comprising:

a message data extraction unit for identifying a sender and a recipient of an electronic message; and

a classifier coupled to the message data extraction unit and being responsive to a relative organizational distance between the sender and the recipient

for assigning an importance class to the electronic message regardless of whether the sender or the recipient is of higher rank.

20. The system according to claim 19, wherein the classifier is further adapted to assigning said importance class based on at least one additional criterion, selected from the following:

(a) a pre-defined message sender criterion;

(b) a pre-defined content criterion;

(c) a plurality of rules formed by a machine-learning algorithm tracing user actions;

(d) an analysis of e-mail message headers.

21. The system according to claim 19 or 20, further including a rules formation unit comprising:

(a) a set of global control rules relating to an organizational structure and work affiliation among different departments and different hierarchical layers thereof;

(b) a set of control rules relating to ad hoc work groups formed from time to time in said organizational structure; and

(c) a global list of preferred originating addresses external to the organizational structure.

22. A computer program comprising computer program code means for performing all the steps of any one of Claims 1 to 18 when said program is run on a computer.

23. A computer program as claimed in Claim 22 embodied on a computer readable medium.